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### Abstract

Artists play a significant role in processes of cultural transformation by revealing both the restrictive limitations of their culture and how these may be transcended through imagining the barely imaginable. This paper considers two novels which examine issues of race and national identity in a post-colonial context, drawing on myth to evoke possibilities and difficulties of reconciliation. Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) explores Maori/Pakeha relationships in New Zealand, while Peter H0eg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* (1992) looks at the situation of Greenlanders living in Denmark and that country's relation to its former colony, incorporated as a province in 1953, with a system of home rule instituted under the crown in 1979. Each novel has been widely acclaimed in its own country and beyond. *The Bone People* won the Booker prize in 1986 and *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* has achieved best-seller status in translation and been made into a film directed by Billie August. Both books focus on an abused child together with a man and woman who, although not related to him by blood, assume or have thrust on them, the role of parent figures.

DOROTHY JONES

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'social justice cannot be achieved without a cultural transformation, the nature of which we can barely conceive'. (Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous*)

Artists play a significant role in processes of cultural transformation by revealing both the restrictive limitations of their culture and how these may be transcended through imagining the barely imaginable. This paper considers two novels which examine issues of race and national identity in a post-colonial context, drawing on myth to evoke possibilities and difficulties of reconciliation. Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) explores Maori/Pakeha relationships in New Zealand, while Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* (1992) looks at the situation of Greenlanders living in Denmark and that country's relation to its former colony, incorporated as a province in 1953, with a system of home rule instituted under the crown in 1979. Each novel has been widely acclaimed in its own country and beyond. *The Bone People* won the Booker prize in 1986 and *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* has achieved best-seller status in translation and been made into a film directed by Billie August. Both books focus on an abused child together with a man and woman who, although not related to him by blood, assume or have thrust on them, the role of parent figures. Through portrayal of these unorthodox family configurations, each involving a mixture of races, both authors challenge the dominant social structures of their respective countries.

Families feature in the mythology of many cultures, particularly in myths of origin, with the earth represented as mother and the sky as father of all living things. Mythologizing the earth as mother readily leads to envisaging one's native land as a parent. 'One of the most powerful ways the public and private are merged in the ideology of nationalism is the bringing together of the figure of family and nation (the motherland, the fatherland)'.<sup>1</sup> Such a metaphor yields ready political advantage. For example, nineteenth century British imperial ties were strengthened through representing colonies as offspring nurtured by a benevolent Mother England.

But the social institution of the family is itself a myth, part of what Luce

Irigaray describes as 'a patriarchal mythology which hardly ever questions itself as such'.

Patriarchy, like the phallocracy that goes with it, are in part myths which, because they don't stand back to question themselves, take themselves to be the only order possible. That's why we tend to think of myths as representing secondary realities rather than as one of the principal expressions of what orders society at any given time.<sup>2</sup>

This is clearly manifest in the 'family values' rhetoric currently espoused by conservative politicians in many western countries, where 'family' is taken to mean a heterosexual married couple living together with their children, despite the prevalence of so many other types of family formation. But this very diversity generates anxiety which fuels the rhetoric. 'Against this apparently amoral liberalism a hypothetical or mythological "family" serves as a strong metaphor of order and harmony'.<sup>3</sup> It may also justify shifting certain economic responsibilities from the state to the family, expecting it, for example, to shoulder the burden of care for those with mental and physical disabilities. Emphasis on 'family values' also reasserts 'a top-down patriarchal chain of authority starting with God-the-Father', reinforcing a traditional gendered division of labour 'in which women are cast as creatures of nature and nurture and men are creatures of culture and competition'.<sup>4</sup> The family model promoted by conservative politicians is also racially homogenous, with one fundamentalist preacher in the US comparing the home as the basic unit of society with 'the flotsam and jetsam of the ghetto where young people don't know who their parents are'.<sup>5</sup>

In the rhetorical evocation of the family by the New Right we can find an intricate marriage of race, gender, sex and class, in which all but the 'traditional' values are denigrated and devalued, and which effectively construct a white, largely male and middle-class view of what constitutes appropriate sexual behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

The Christian image of the Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child – underlies much of this rhetoric, although the marriage of a young, pregnant woman to a man who is not her child's father hardly corresponds to the approved bourgeois ideal.

For all its political manipulation, the idea of family carries powerful emotional resonance, evoking for many Edenic memories of childhood. In *The Bone People*, Keri Hulme uses the motif of families shattered and reconnected in unorthodox ways to indicate the racial and personal conflicts colonization produced in New Zealand, while also invoking the possibility of creating a lost paradisiacal world, (assumed to have existed in a distant pre-colonial past) as a way of healing the nation's division and injustice. The three principal characters, unrelated by blood and locked in conflict, eventually form a powerful family unit with strong mythic reverberations.

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great.

Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.<sup>7</sup>

Artist Kerewin Holmes, 'by blood ... an eighth Maori,' feels all Maori 'by heart, spirit, and inclination' (p. 62). She has, however, quarreled with her family and used the wealth won in a lottery to build a tower where she can pursue the pleasures of art and intellect. Joe Gillayley, a factory worker, embittered by the death of his wife and infant son, is three-quarters Maori but feels 'that the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live' (p. 62). The two are brought together by Joe's foster-son Simon, aged about seven, the only survivor of a yacht travelling from Ireland and wrecked off the New Zealand coast. Simon, traumatized by previous ill-treatment, is mute when he comes into Joe's care; he is a visionary, brilliant, but very difficult child whom Joe loves deeply yet bitterly resents, to the point of battering him brutally and violently when he is drunk.

Kerewin and Joe, both social outsiders, are drawn to one another, although no romance develops since Kerewin is uninterested in forming sexual attachments, describing herself as a neuter. In creating her character, Hulme deliberately shatters preconceived ideas of female behaviour.

she's doing things which in New Zealand society are still considered to be masculine, or part of the masculine role. Being extraordinarily skilled in fighting, being able to drink anyone under the table, taking on the male ethos in its own terms, being financially independent and able to take care of herself physically<sup>8</sup>

Kerewin has little maternal feeling and Simon overcomes her initial resentment at his trespass onto her property only through sheer force of personality. Symbol of her eccentricity and social isolation, the tower constitutes a rich world of the imagination as well as a material treasure house of artistic and intellectual riches. But, for all its fascination, Joe perceives the tower as inhuman (p. 101). Kerewin, having cut herself off from close human contact, signified by the rupture with her family, finds her artistic powers vanished and her tower a prison.

Despite his relationship with Simon, Joe's existence is also lonely and considerably more Spartan than Kerewin's: 'I work in a factory, work in a factory, work in a factory' (p. 89). Although he has met 'All the good old pakeha standbys and justifications': with money saved and the mortgage paid off, Joe's house and garden are aesthetically impoverished and barren. 'A neat lawn bordered by concrete paths. No flowers. No shrubs. The places where a garden had been were filled with pink gravel' (p. 76). Such bleakness represents more than material poverty, indicating how heavily the social restrictions and suppression of spirit, which the novel

implies are endemic in New Zealand society, weigh upon Joe. His brutality to Simon allegorizes further aspects of that society – a propensity to violence, oppression of the weak by the strong, and a desire to enforce conformity with narrow, puritanical standards: Kerewin notes 'how parents in our society tend easily to tyranny' (p. 59). Yet, despite Joe's cruelty, the novel also conveys vividly his love for Simon and the author states how, here too, she has challenged conventional stereotypes. 'Joe has a lot of gentle, sensitive, nurturing so-called female traits. I deliberately set out, in the character of Joe, to turn the sexual stereotype on its head'.<sup>9</sup>

There is also a feminine aspect to Simon, who, with his long hair, is initially mistaken for a girl when Joe discovers him on the beach. His characterization is impressive, conveying a child's delight in the world, his waywardness, destructive fury and moments of mystical awareness. An insight that he, Joe and Kerewin belong together inspires much of his demonic behaviour – flicking lighted matches at Kerewin, for example, when she proclaims her self-sufficiency (p. 105). At other times, he tries to deflect both adults' rage onto himself in a desperate attempt to prevent them breaking apart as each gives way to bouts of bleak depression and anger, Joe through loneliness and deprivation and Kerewin from self-hatred and grief for her lost artistic capacity. Yet the image of family the novel presents is utterly convincing.

That ... is the imaginative strength of the work – that it creates a sexual union where no sex occurs, creates parental love where there are no physical parents, creates the stress and fusion of a family where there is no actual family.<sup>10</sup>

But these emotional bonds are deeply threatened by violence and individual self-destructiveness. In a powerful climax, the precarious connection between all three is shattered when, with Kerewin's complicity, Joe beats Simon almost to death.

Simon's suffering and the horrific beatings he receives are graphically conveyed, but the vividly portrayed love between man and child and the novel's sympathetic presentation of Joe have led critics to suggest it is complicit in the evil of child abuse.<sup>11</sup> Hulme, however, confronts the painful issue of what society has to offer the abused child when removed from the abuser. Towards the end of the novel Joe reflects on his treatment of Simon.

I was ashamed of him. I wanted him as ordinarily complex and normally simple as one of Piri's rowdies. I resented his difference, and therefore, I tried to make him as tame and malleable as possible, so I could show myself, 'You've made him what he is, even if you didn't breed him'. (p. 381)

Once out of hospital, Simon, his face badly scarred and hearing almost destroyed, is sent to a Hohepa children's home and expected to conform to much narrower social stereotypes than those Joe sought to impose.

Hoehepa is the Maori form of Joseph and Hulme's point is that the home, in its own way, is equally disciplinarian, and, on top of that, unable to offer Simon genuine love and affection or even to communicate effectively with him. Those running it are powerless when the child proves totally resistant to all their efforts.

We could, I suppose, if we merely wanted to make him conform to our standards, be brutal to him. Take away all his small treasures, insist he does as he's told, and order things in such a manner that he's obliged to. Starve him, or beat him, or something disgusting like that ... But we are here to help him. He simply doesn't want to be helped by us. (pp. 404-5)

Simon continually runs away, attempting to get back to Joe and Kerewin, but each of the adults must undertake a spiritual journey before reconciliation can occur. Kerewin, apparently afflicted with cancer, dismantles most of her tower, kindling an enormous bonfire from the wreckage in which she fires a clay sculpture of three heads with hair entwined – her own, Joe's and Simon's – a sign that she now recognizes the importance of their connection. Abandoning the preoccupation with material possessions signified by the tower, she then retreats to the bush to confront death. There she undergoes a mystical healing process, assisted by a strange, androgynous figure who may or may not be supernatural. Then, prompted by a dream, she rebuilds a ruined Maori meeting-house symbolizing her commitment to an ideal of community.

Although the novel draws on a wide range of mythologies, Hulme uses Maori myth to resolve her characters' sufferings and to focus on what she has to say. After serving a prison sentence, Joe goes alone to an isolated stretch of bush to commit suicide. There he meets an old Maori wise man or *kaumatua*, who tells him he is destined to assume his role as guardian of the sanctuary of a god, a stone brought by one of the first canoes in which Maori people emigrated to New Zealand. According to the *kaumatua*, the divine presence or *mauri* which resides in the stone 'is the heart of this country. The heart of this land' (p. 364), the novel's implication being that the spiritual core of the country lies not in European, but in Maori spiritual tradition and belief. This spiritual presence is threatened by the loveless response to the land, shown by white New Zealanders in particular, comparable to the scarring inflicted on Simon's body:

Joe thought of the forests burned and cut down; the gouges and scars that dams and roadworks and development schemes had made; the peculiar barren paddocks where alien animals, one kind of crop, grazed imported grasses; the erosion, the overfertilization, the pollution. (p. 371)

Joe accepts the role of guardian and, when an earthquake dislodges the stone from its hiding-place, carries it back to the ruins of Kerewin's tower. Kerewin brings Simon back from the Hohepa home and, reunited



with her family through Joe's help, builds out of the tower's ruins a quite different dwelling-place where people can live in community with one another. The novel ends on a note of hope with the unity she, Joe and Simon represent restored once more, a symbol of healing for the entire country.

Although the novel validates Maori spirituality as a more appropriate agent than Christianity for the full realization of New Zealand national identity, Hulme, as Mark Williams points out, makes much use of Christian imagery, especially in relation to Simon.<sup>12</sup> Kerewin first sees him 'standing stiff and straight like some weird saint in a stained gold window ... haloed in hair, shrouded in the dying sunlight' (p. 16). Later he gives Kerewin a jeweled rosary, 'the making of a garden of prayers' (p. 69). Attached to it is a signet ring engraved with a phoenix which, with its symbolism of rising reborn from the flames, is appropriate to all three major characters. In a more indigenous image, Simon and the promise he represents appear linked to the kowhai seeds which Kerewin identifies for him: 'golden seeds for golden flowers, seaborne to make more sea-trees' (p. 125). The novel's concluding scene of harmony and reconciliation occurs at Christmas and, as Williams comments, 'the novel offers us a complete version of the Holy Family with Simon as Christlike victim, Joseph as the celibate human father, and Kerewin as the virgin mother'.<sup>13</sup>

The hopeful note on which *The Bone People* concludes is absent from *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* where reconciliation and hopes for social renewal are represented as only a remote possibility overshadowed by a grossly materialistic and unjust society. Although Hulme's novel was not published until 1984, it was written in the 1970s, participating in the mood of a decade when hitherto silenced groups were finding a voice and progressive social change seemed more likely, whereas *Miss Smilla* is very much a response to the 'greed is good' 1980s. Høeg uses the thriller genre, with a touch of science fiction at the end. The action is fast-paced and increasingly violent as one mystery leads to another, while the tone is bleak, with betrayal on every hand. Unlike Keri Hulme, the author does not aim at forging a new ideal of national identity, but seeks rather, to define Danish society in terms of its limitations and injustices, particularly in relation to its treatment of Greenland and Greenlanders.

The novel opens with the funeral of a young Greenlandic boy, Isaiah Christesen. The narrator, Smilla Jaspersen, half Greenlandic, half Dane, refuses to believe the police explanation that his fall from a rooftop was accidental and the narrative comprises her quest for the truth. Exploring a dark underside to the bourgeois prosperity of Copenhagen leads her into a world of dangerous criminality and a hazardous midwinter voyage up the West Greenland coast. Not wholly by choice, Smilla joins forces with a Dane, Peter Føjl, generally referred to as 'the mechanic', who rents a flat in her apartment block where Isaiah also lived with his alcoholic



mother, Juliane. Although Isaiah had befriended both, Smilla and the mechanic come together in a distrustful yet passionate relationship only after Isaiah's death. Isaiah's connection with each adult is deeply important, but the familial grouping is considerably more tentative than in *The Bone People* and both man and child are revealed wholly through Smilla's perceptions.

Despite her small stature, Smilla bears some resemblance to the larger than life Kerewin Holmes. Each displays a comparable array of encyclopedic knowledge – Kerewin of literature, mythology, religion and natural history, Smilla of snow, ice, mathematics, geology and life among the Inuit. Although lacking Kerewin's martial arts training, Smilla proves amazingly competent in self-defence against innumerable savage and brutal attacks. Her skill in negotiating frozen surfaces, learnt in Greenland, means that, to the uninitiated, she even seems to walk on water. Smilla also has an androgynous quality, related in part to her Greenlandic origins. At school in Denmark, a classmate takes it for granted she is a boy.<sup>14</sup> She refers to 'the natural acceptance in Greenland that each of the sexes contains the potential to become its opposite' (p.28) and recounts the creation myth told to the Danish explorer and anthropologist, Knud Rasmussen by Aisivak, a Polar Eskimo woman.

in the beginning the world was inhabited only by two men, who were both great sorcerers. Since they wanted to multiply, one of them transformed his body in such a way that he could give birth; and then the two of them created many children. (p. 28)<sup>15</sup>

Although Smilla's mother had fulfilled the traditional Greenlandic woman's role, she also 'shot and paddled a kayak and dragged meat home like a man' (p. 28).

Smilla is a result of 'the white hot energy' generated between her Inuit mother and Danish father, Moritz Jaspersen, in Greenland on a scientific research expedition. After her mother's death in a hunting accident, Smilla, at seven, is forced into her father's custody in Denmark. Living in the fatherland, she yearns for her mother country remembering how, out on the ice, her mother would offer a brilliantly white breast, 'with a big, delicate rose areola', so she might drink '*immuk*, my mother's milk' (p.30). As a child, Smilla continually tries to escape back to Greenland, reflecting in adulthood on 'the countless kilometres children have put behind them in search of a decent life' (p. 55). For her, Greenland remains associated with the freedom and Edenic existence of early childhood. A society where personal possessions count for very little and people live communally<sup>16</sup> is implicitly contrasted with the luxury, materialism and rapacity of bourgeois Danish life. But Inuit society has been deeply corrupted by that materialism.

Only ten years ago they were smuggling liquor and cigarettes up here. That's already a thing of the past. That's already the good old days. Now there's lots of

cocaine in Nuuk. There's a Greenland upper class who live like Europeans. (p.369)

Nevertheless, Smilla is forced to admit that however she may hate Danish colonization, it 'irrefutably improved the material needs of an existence that was one of the most difficult in the world' (p. 275).

Smilla, at thirty-seven, is on the margins, a rebel living on her father's handouts. Despite her scientific distinction as a glaciologist, publishing a paper on ice research and the profit motive in relation to Arctic Ocean oil reserves has led to a defamation conviction and expulsion from the Danish Glaciology Society. From an official perspective she is someone, 'Who is unemployed. Who has no family. Who has stirred up conflict wherever she has been. Who has never been able to fit in. Who is aggressive. And who vacillates around political extremes' (p. 90). Ironically, the education which has developed Smilla's profound insight into the physical structure of her mother country has removed her still further from her roots. But she remains dominated by a passion for geometry, snow and space.

Geometry exists as an innate phenomenon in our consciousness. In the external world a perfectly formed snow crystal would never exist. But in our consciousness lies the glittering and flawless knowledge of perfect ice. (p. 263)

She also possesses an intuitive sense of orientation, able to find her goal unerringly: 'I have only to look at a map once and the landscape rises up from the paper' (p. 71). This uncanny sense of direction, related to her sense of 'Absolute Space – that which stands still, that which we can cling to' (p. 38) also becomes, for Smilla, an image of moral purpose. The capacity to live and move amidst ice and not be frozen into immobility is an important image of moral integrity in the novel. Smilla aims to resemble supercooled water drops which remain liquid in high Arctic cloud at temperatures of -40C: 'They ought to freeze, but they don't; they remain stationary and stable and fluid' (p. 332). Moving across the frozen surface of Copenhagen harbour, she contemplates Denmark as a spit of ice with its inhabitants all frozen in fixed hierarchies. 'Isaiah's death is an irregularity, an eruption that produced a fissure. That fissure has set me free' (p. 204).

Like Simon in *The Bone People*, Isaiah represents hope for a new order. Although created for us out of Smilla's memories, he is vividly present in the novel – a grubby, cheeky, neglected child, partially deaf from middle-ear infections caused by his mother's failure to dress him warmly enough. Like Kerewin, Smilla is short on maternal instinct, telling Isaiah to 'Beat it, you little shit' when she first sees him lying on the stairs. His immediate recognition of their shared Greenlandic background startles her. Closer knowledge leads her to believe he might have been able to reconcile Dane and Greenland within himself: 'He would have been able to absorb Denmark and transform it and become

both' (p. 68). Eventually she comes to feel as if he were her own child (p.358). Like Hulme, Peter Høeg draws on biblical imagery. The Old Testament book of Isaiah contains many references to a divine child who will bring peace and harmony to a troubled land so that wolf and lamb will live together, the leopard will lie down with the kid 'and a little child shall lead them'.<sup>17</sup> Such passages are often regarded as prefiguring Christ's birth. 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace'.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, Isaiah is killed shortly before Christmas. As a child in Greenland, Smilla had imagined the three wise men travelling across the ice on dog sleighs: 'They had grasped hold of Absolute Space. They knew they were on the right track. Moving towards an energy phenomenon. That's what the Infant Jesus was for me' (p. 107). Isaiah, too, represents 'a column of energy in the universe'. He is envisaged, not as a supernatural phenomenon, but holding, like every child, a promise for the future, part of the mortality and continuity of all things:

he would still be here, and after him would come his children or other children, a wheel of children, a chain, a spiral winding into eternity. (p. 358)

But the promise of childhood may be perverted. As Smilla penetrates the web of intrigue behind Isaiah's death, she learns of another character, Tørk Hviid a scientist, son of a failed composer, whose bitter, neglected childhood is described in a letter from a famous singer, formerly her father's friend.

They [his parents] washed their hands of the boy. Holes in his clothes, red-eyed, never had a bicycle, was beaten at the local proletarian school because he was too weak from hunger to defend himself. Because Jonathan was supposed to be a great artist. You've all betrayed your children. And it takes an old queen like me to tell you. (p. 179)

Tørk develops into a ruthless, charismatic figure, whose very personality seems invaded by ice. In contrast with Isaiah, he is a demonic figure who has masterminded a criminal enterprise which involves commissioning a ship sailing to Gela Alta, an island off the West Greenland coast. It is also he who has terrorized Isaiah into jumping off the roof because the boy had possession of a tape with vital information on it. The mechanic, too, is involved in his schemes, though this is revealed only towards the end of the novel.

The mechanic is a morally ambivalent figure. His tenderness toward Isaiah is conveyed in a description of his workshop.

The place is a double world. Above is the workbench, the tools, the tall office chair. Below, under the table, the universe is duplicated half-size. A little masonite table with a coping saw, screwdriver, chisel. A little stool. A workbench. A little vice. A beer crate. A cigar box with about thirty cans of Humbrol. Isaiah's things. (p. 43)

In this world, Isaiah's deafness is less of an impediment. 'In the mechanic he found someone with whom he could communicate in other ways than through language' (p. 43). But the mechanic was also on the roof when Isaiah fell, though, until Smilla eventually makes it plain to him, he believes the child's death an accident, unaware of Tørk's part in it. Despite his divided allegiance, the mechanic has a gentle, nurturing side to him. He also loves Smilla and seeks to protect her, but, believing the Gela Alta expedition will lead to treasure, he has fallen under Tørk's spell – 'Sometimes a person's charisma is such that it slips right through our façades, or essential prejudices and inhibitions, and goes straight to our guts' (p. 290). But, although Smilla must revise her estimate of the mechanic, she still maintains her alliance with him.

I look at him. I see his weight, his slowness, his vigour, his greed, and his simplicity. His need for a leader, the danger he represents. I also see his carefulness, his warmth, his patience, his passion. And I see that he is still my only chance. (p. 372)

The ship sailing north carries, for sale in Greenland, a new form of double-strength heroin, created by Tørk who is a microbiologist specializing in radiation mutations. But the voyage's principal purpose is to quarry and transport a gigantic stone located in an ice-cave in the Barren Glacier on Gela Alta, and the mechanic has been hired for his diving skills in relation to this project. This sinister stone, which generates heat even when surrounded by ice, may be of extraterrestrial origin, perhaps even an inorganic life-form. The surrounding water contains the larvae of a mutated form of the Arctic worm. This once relatively harmless parasite, which normally infests only larger sea mammals, has now adapted to attack the human body with disastrous consequences: 'It kills its host. It's a poor parasite, in terms of human beings. But an excellent killer' (p. 398). The mysterious stone, the mutated parasite and the heroin form a cluster of images reinforcing the novel's condemnation of greed and injustice. Human beings, like the mutant worm, are perceived as inefficient parasites destroying the earth on which they are totally dependent. Smilla's embarkation is preceded by a visit in search of information to the Casino which seems to encapsulate capitalist society and the parasitism on which it depends. An important money-laundering centre for drug money, the Casino is also a major source of government income, overseen by bureaucrats from the tax authorities and plainclothes police. As one of its owners explains to Smilla:

you remember what men look like inside. Heart, brain, liver, kidneys, stomach, testicles. When they come in here, a change takes place. The moment you buy your chips, a little animal takes up residence inside you, a little parasite. Finally there's nothing left but the attempt to remember what cards have been dealt (p.193)

Drug-addiction is yet another parasite devouring human beings.

Tørk gives a desire for money and fame as the reason he is so anxious to transport the stone back to Denmark and is indifferent to the devastation the worm might cause in densely populated areas: 'In reality it's unimportant whether the stone is alive or not. What counts is its size. Its heat. The worm around it. It's the biggest scientific discovery of the century' (p. 404). Smilla's reaction is very different.

At this moment it becomes the crystallization of the attitude of Western science towards the world. Calculation, hatred, hope, fear, the attempt to measure everything. And above all else, stronger than any empathy for living things: the desire for money. (p. 404)

Tørk is eventually foiled by attacks from the mechanic and the ship's captain whom Smilla has finally convinced of his treachery and dangerousness. As he crosses the ice, attempting to return to the ship, Smilla, with her knowledge of ice and intuitive sense of direction, leads him off course towards open water where the evil product of a warped childhood may meet the child whose potential was never realized.

Towards the spot where the current has hollowed out the ice so it's as thin as a foetal membrane, and under it the sea is dark and salty like blood, and a face is pressing up against the icy membrane from below; it's Isaiah's face, the as yet unborn Isaiah. He's calling Tørk. Is it Isaiah who is pulling him along, or am I the one who is trying to head him off and force him towards the thin ice? (p. 410)

Like Keri Hulme, Peter Høeg draws on a wide range of mythology. Smilla refers to various Inuit myths and, at times, the novel evokes a sense of the traditional Inuit belief in an environment governed by spirits and powerful forces.<sup>19</sup> The ship voyaging to Greenland is called the *Kronos*, the name both of a god in classical Greek mythology who devoured his own children and of Time which eventually destroys all it has generated – appropriate allusions in a novel so concerned with cruelty to children and pervaded by a sense that humanity's time is running out. Gaia, the earth goddess, mother to Kronos, is the name James Lovelock used as shorthand for his hypothesis 'that the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment'<sup>20</sup> Tørk dismisses this theory in favour of a concept of 'Life based on inorganic matter' (p. 393). But the earth itself is his eventual destruction. Smilla foresees his death on the ice where 'the cold will transform him; like a stalactite, a frozen shell will close around a barely fluid life until even his pulse stops and he becomes one with the landscape. You can't win against the ice' (p. 410).

Norse mythology also contributes to the apocalyptic tone. Smilla refers to Norse belief in the Fimbul winter which will extend for three years when sun and moon will be devoured and the gods destroyed, a disaster preceded by widespread criminality and cruelty among human beings.<sup>21</sup>

She remembers hearing the legend at school, contrasting it with Greenlandic attitudes: 'Winter was a time for community, not for the end of the world' (p. 241). But the sense of a world threatened with extinction by human corruption is powerfully developed in the novel, although the Norse myth promises universal destruction will be followed by renewal.

a new world was destined to rise from the old, and would emerge from the ocean after the fires of destruction had been quenched. This world was in fact the old one cleansed and renewed ... Out of the sea also came the rulers who were to bring peace and prosperity to the land. The image which men liked to form of them was of a little child voyaging alone in a boat<sup>22</sup>

Høeg's novel offers little promise of a new world although, in a sense, Isaiah preserves the one we have by drawing Tørk, potential destroyer of humanity, to his death through Smilla's passionate desire to discover what actually happened to him.

Both Hulme and Høeg use the motif, found in many mythologies, of a divine child who plays a redemptive role. While emphasizing the child's extreme vulnerability, each author suggests he offers hope for a way forward so oppression may be lifted and different races reconciled. Simon and Isaiah each draw a pair of parents into a family group. *The Bone People* celebrates this conjunction and, for all Høeg's pessimism in *Miss Smilla*, he leads us to believe that Isaiah, had he lived, could have drawn on Smilla's knowledge and the mechanic's technical skills to integrate Dane and Greenlander within himself. These reconfigured families greatly modify traditional sex-role stereotypes, with Kerewin and Smilla assuming many masculine qualities while Joe and the mechanic display qualities of nurturance, even though in each case the man fails disastrously in his responsibility to the child. In both novels the child and the family grouping he creates are linked to land – to New Zealand as a country in *The Bone People* and to the environment generally in *Miss Smilla*. Each novelist has sought to imagine differently ways adults might relate to children and to one another.

## NOTES

1. Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of Identity: the Art of Nation* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), p. 99
2. Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous: toward a culture of difference*, trans., Alison Martin (N.Y. and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 23-4.
3. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (N. Y. and London: Routledge, 1985), p. 40.
4. Catharine Lumby, 'Back to the Brady Bunch', in Phillip Adams, ed., *The Retreat From Tolerance: a Snapshot of Australian Society* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1997), p. 111.
5. Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents*, p. 40.
6. *Ibid*, p. 41.



7. Keri Hulme, *The Bone People* (Auckland: Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p. 4. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. Sue Kedgley, ed., *Our Own Country* (Auckland: Penguin, 1989), p. 103.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
10. C.K.Stead, *Answering to the Language: Essays on Modern Writers* (Auckland: Auckland U.P., 1989), p. 181.
11. See C.K.Stead, *Ibid.*, p. 183 and Mark Williams, *Leaving the Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists* (Auckland: Auckland U.P., 1990), p. 108.
12. Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 103.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
14. Peter Høeg, *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow*, trans., F.David (London: Harvill, 1993), p. 45. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
15. See also Knud Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North: a Record*, compiled from the Danish originals and edited by G. Herring (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trüner, 1908), p. 102.
16. See Henrik Rink, *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, trans., by the author (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1974, first published, 1875), pp. 10-12.
17. Isaiah, ch. 11, v.6.
18. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, v.6.
19. Nelda Swinton, *La Déesse Inuite de la Mer ? The Inuit Sea Goddess* (Montreal: Musée des Beaux Arts, 1980), p. 5.
20. James Lovelock, *Gaia: a New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1987), p. xii.
21. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: the Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Watson, 1964), p. 280, p. 283.
22. H.R.Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 138.